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Negative Causation and Causal Explanation

Dissertation - Summary

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The main topic of this dissertation is negative causation. We can easily grasp the concept of negative causation if we think of omission, prevention and double prevention which are the basic types of negative causation. The questions about negative causation are familiar from metaphysics of positive causation: what is the nature of the relation, what are the relata of this relation, and whether the relation is genuinely causal.

In the first part of my paper I shortly introduce the two main types of reductive theories of causation, the difference making and the process-linkage approach, and the two related philosophical attitudes, conceptual analysis and empirical analysis, and I show that we need the core ideas of these approaches in order to develop a viable approach to causation.

In the next part I summarize a view which states that absences are functional properties realized by positive properties, and I argue that the relation between absences and positive events cannot be analogous with the relation between pain and its realizer, therefore the functionalist view cannot be applied to absences. I take the role-functionalist view of absences to be equivalent with the view that absences are disjunctive events which are essentially absences, and I agree with David Lewis that it is not necessary to stick to this idea for we have another option, namely that absences are events which are only accidentally absences. I call this approach the 'qua-view' and examine it in details.

After arguing that the relata of causation are events which occasionally have the property of being accidentally an absence of something, I propose a solution to the problem of the nature of causal relation in the form of a hybrid approach, first suggested by Jonathan Schaffer, which synthesizes the counterfactual and process-linkage views of causation. First, I argue that we need a theory which is capable to reconcile the intrinsic and the extrinsic character of causation, and then I argue that a hybrid approach is more apt to this task than the so called two-concept model, because the latter view faces exactly the same problems as the counterfactual and process-linkage views. I replace Schaffer's own view of relata with the qua-view, and then I apply it to cases of omission, prevention and double prevention.

However, as the difficulties of analyses of causation show which mostly take the form of counterexamples, we need to supplement our approach with certain principles suitable for blocking possible counterexamples.

My claim is that we have to analyze the sources of our intuitions about causation in order to cast light to these principles. I argue that the foundation of these intuitions is to be found in folk physics. I suggest that we have to examine causal situations with the help of a conceptual framework provided by folk physics in order to decide whether the alleged counterexamples

are formulated properly or not. I demonstrate how this framework works by showing in the case of two types of counterexamples that they seemed to be problems only because they misrepresented the structure of the causal system in question. I argue that the hybrid approach supplemented by the framework provided by folk physics has the potential to be a successful theory of causation.

In the last part of my thesis I criticize Schaffer's main argument for genuinism, the argument from paradigmatic case. I aim to show that this argument is flawed because it uses disconnection as a paradigmatic case of negative causation which turns out to be a paradigmatic case of positive causation. I argue that we can try to save Schaffer's argument if we replace disconnection with double prevention but with this move the argument loses a great deal of strength.